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St. Paul's College - Comprehensive Review Report 2008

1. INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1851, St Paul's College is the longest established school in Hong Kong. With a history closely linked to the evolving development of Hong Kong and to the role of the Church of England within this, and given its central location (for a hundred years in Lower Albert Road associated with the Bishop's residence, and for the past fifty years opposite the University of Hong Kong in Bonham Road) and the high community standing of many of its alumni, St Paul's stands today as a significant part of the overall education scene of Hong Kong.

1.1 Mission and Values

The Mission of the school today remains steadfast to the intent of its founders - to provide the local Chinese youths a modern, liberal education in the English language, based on the tenets of the Church of England, now continued by the Sheng Kung Hui. The school remains fully committed to the Hong Kong school curriculum as developed within the Education Bureau (EDB).

Its eight clearly stated goals can perhaps be summed up by three commitments which the Review team saw to be deeply embedded in the school culture. First, a commitment to educational excellence in all its varied activities; second, the promotion of respectful interpersonal relationships, with the twin developments of leadership and community service; and third, to ensure the education of students is conducted within a global mindset, encouraging both global awareness and global action.

In documented and observable ways, the Review team believes the Mission and Values of the school to be actively and genuinely lived out in the day to day life of the school community. They are certainly not simply high sounding statements on paper.

1.2 Basic Information about the School

The school today is established under the St Paul's College Council Incorporation Ordinance (1962). Under the Ordinance, the Bishop of Hong Kong and Macau is the Chairman of the Council. The Ordinance closely prescribes the composition of the Council and includes a statement of the Objectives of the school. Both the Supervisor and the Principal are appointed by the Council.

St Paul's College is a secondary day school for boys. It has been a boys' school throughout its existence, though it does presently have two girls studying in Form 6. Its current enrolment is around 1080, comprising 36 classes made up of six classes (roughly of 30 students each) in each of Forms 1 to 5, and three classes in each of Forms 6 and 7. The student intake at Form 1 comes in three components: one group is

drawn from St Paul's College Primary School, a second comes through external advertisement and a selection process within the school, and a third group comes through the process of central allocation. Further selection is needed for the smaller numbers of classes after Form 5. The school regrets the departure of some boys who are not selected to remain for the final two years, and who are required to find places in other schools. It looks forward with positive anticipation to ending this when the New Senior Secondary arrangements are in place.

There are 71 teaching staff members, including the Principal and two Vice-Principals. Teachers are appointed within subject departments, though they undertake other roles in pastoral care, as Form teachers, and they take responsibility for co-curricular and extra curricular activities. Support staff, numbering about 14, comprise office staff, laboratory technicians, information technology assistants, and a library assistant. Additionally, there are a number of janitors.

Soon after the Education Commission recommended (in its Report No. 3, 1988) the introduction of the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), the school sought to join, to gain the benefits of lower class sizes, a capacity to offer a wider variety of subjects, enhanced language instruction, facilities and extra-curricular activities. The school retains freedom in curriculum, in setting fees, and in setting entrance requirements. From 2002 the school has enjoyed DSS status, and the Primary School joined the following year, 2003.

Since joining the DSS scheme, the school believes it has developed alongside the intention of the Scheme, maintaining its commitment to the local curriculum and to the Hong Kong examination system, and by assisting needy families with fee remission, maintaining sufficient classrooms and specialist teaching rooms, and ensuring all teachers are qualified, trained and registered with EDB. No private classes are operated by or in the College.

When compared with most common local schools, St Paul's College enjoys a more favourable ratio of staff to students. It is better than the school could achieve before it gained the financial benefit of direct subsidy through joining DSS in 2002.

1.3 Comprehensive Review Methodology

The Comprehensive Review Team (CRT) was nominated by the school in 2007 and approved by EDB in January 2008. The Team initially comprised two overseas educator as Chair and Vice-Chair, and a further seven local members, drawn to cover all Key Learning Areas. The Vice-Chair became a local member at the time of review, when he returned to Hong Kong for service. In addition, EDB nominated an officer as an observer in the review process. In consultation with the Chair, the school also appointed a person with no previous contact to act as Executive Officer to the CRT.

Both the Chair and Vice-Chair have had no prior contact with the school. They have had extensive involvement in both school and university education, and with education in Hong Kong. They have also occupied senior management roles in educational institutions and agencies.

A preliminary visit to the school was made by the Chair in mid-September 2007. This enabled extensive discussion with the Principal and the opportunity to meet many senior staff, and to see the school at work. A meeting was also arranged with the Council. Importantly, an initial plan was agreed on the activities and likely detailed schedule for the Review itself, and agreement was reached on the scope and nature of documentation to be made available for the CRT, much of it in advance of the visit. The Principal kept in contact with the Chair over the subsequent months as planning for the Review intensified and details were finalized.

As agreed with EDB, the Review was conducted in two parts: a three day Programme Review followed by a three day Management Review. This occurred in March 2008. These two components were preceded by a half-day preliminary visit of the full CRT to meet the staff, explain the nature and purpose of the review and the process and procedure to be adopted, and for the Team to tour the school. This visit was the first opportunity for the CRT to meet each other, and to have preliminary discussions of the task ahead.

Within the CRT, a core group of five had been identified, comprising the Chair (who also had responsibility for Science), the Vice-Chair (who had responsibility for PSHE, Personal, Social and Humanities Education) and three members responsible respectively for English Language, Chinese Language and Mathematics. In practice, the entire CRT built a sense of cohesion and nearly all members participated fully in both components of the Review. Nearly all members attended the evening meetings held respectively with the Parent Teacher Association, and with members of the Council.

The assistance provided by the school for this Review was exemplary. A Conference Room was made available for the exclusive use of the Team throughout. This enabled opportunities for Team members to interact in small groups, and in full plenary discussion. The availability of the room made it easy to hold brief meetings at short notice. This helped Team members to share expectations and establish agreed common standards. Suitable meeting spaces were programmed to enable individual meetings between a team member and an individual staff member. And a larger meeting room was used for meetings where the full CRT met with a roughly equivalent number of school staff (or students) for discussion of particular topics.

Key documents were readily available. Each team member was sent a large number of reports, files and other documents in advance. Three large box files were sent to each member. Further copies of these documents, and many other documents (such as Examination papers, internal school and public external, Schemes of Work for all KLAs) were available in the Conference Room used by the Team, with a File Index for easy identification. These documents were frequently consulted, and many were consulted from the school intranet. Another room was set aside for team members to view student work and its correction by teachers. This was helped by sampling each subject and year level according to achievement - above the norm, average and below average. The scope of student achievement could thus be quickly seen. Student assignments across subjects were displayed in a secured classroom for examination by CRT members. This allowed for the triangulation of data collected via school documentation, classroom observation, focus group discussion with both students and

teachers, and students' works. The CRT was impressed with the amount of information available for this Comprehensive Review exercise.

During the three-day Programme Review, 61 lesson periods of 57 teachers were formally assessed and rated. The outcomes are recorded in an Appendix titled Overall Rating of Teaching Performance in the Classroom. All eight key learning areas were covered, with classes in year levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6. (Students in Year levels 5 and 7 were at the time preparing for or doing examinations). Times were arranged for individual discussion between the team member separately with each teacher who had been observed. In this way, the CRT was able to meet personally most teachers at the school.

During the Programme Review each CRT member met with relevant Heads of Department to discuss their observations and to learn more about the work of the Departments. Towards the end of the Programme Review, CRT members met again with Heads to provide oral feedback and preliminary findings. CRT members also met with individual teachers after lesson observation. They were welcomed by teachers who voluntarily organized themselves to discuss issues they encountered and ways for improvement of teaching.

During the Management Review, a number of group meetings were held. This included a valuable presentation by the Principal, an extended meeting with the School Improvement Team (a key executive group), meetings with groups of students, some of whom held specific leadership positions, and an extended meeting with various teachers responsible for elements of the school support programmes.

Less formal observations of activities around the school were made throughout the seven days. One highlight was attending the Easter Service, which gave insight into the ethos of the school, and to the choral work and the public speaking of the boys.

The findings presented in the report derive from study of extensive documentation, a considerable number of observations made by a large Review team, and many discussions held with school personnel, including the boys, parents, Council members, and alumni. The findings expressed are the corporate judgment of the CRT based on this evidence and data.

MANAGEMENT REVIEW

2. MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

- 2.1 A major and enduring impression gained by the CRT is that the school presently is enjoying a period of clear and consistent leadership, where the longstanding Mission and Values of the institution are being interpreted in a contemporary context, and a direction for development is being articulated, discussed widely by all stakeholders, and is being implemented in both policy and operational terms.
- 2.2 The relationships observed between key school personnel are professional and harmonious, and contribute a great deal to the observable successes. There is a good working relationship between the Principal, the two Vice-Principals and other members of the leadership team (styled School Improvement Team), and similar effective relationships between Principal and Chair of the Council, and between Principal and Chair of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The Principal was observed many times throughout the Review in quiet informal conversation with the students, with individual staff, both teaching staff and support staff.
- 2.3 To reduce a long list of goals for the school community to embrace, the Principal defined three straightforward priorities by way of a 'Principal's Pledge'. This device has focused on three themes: improving academic endeavour, encouraging boys to take up leadership opportunities especially in community service, and promoting global awareness in a community where, despite its central position in global finance and trade, many boys can grow up, be educated and spend their working lives with limited experience outside of Hong Kong itself. The CRT notes not only the defining of these particular priorities, but also the effectiveness of a technique which enables the entire school community to share the same priorities and to interpret a great deal of their day-by-day activities within this broader frame. In anticipating priorities for a second three year period, these same areas are to be each further developed - not just repeated, and not neglected in favour of new goals, but rather further elaborated, with higher expectations of action by the boys and by the school. The CRT also notes awareness of the priorities set forward by the principal at different levels of management, e.g. Vice-Principals and Department Heads. All this shows obvious leadership in place.
- 2.4 Two documents which serve to anchor and guide development overall are the School Development Plan 2006/07- 2008/09 (which itself is accompanied by Annual School Plans), and the School Report 2006/2007. The School Development Plan contains a sharp analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The CRT sees this brief statement as a realistic positioning guide for the school. The Team saw it as an accurate self evaluation, facing up explicitly to some problems, while acknowledging the strengths from which further growth can occur. In particular, it admits that

some teachers have ‘yet to adapt themselves fully to new teaching methods and pedagogies’, and it sees the greatest threat to the school being ‘to maintain a high level of academic achievement in a climate of increasing competition from other schools’. The CRT concurs. In more detail, appended to the School Report 2006/2007, is a 19 page School Self-Evaluation Report, which contains reflective analysis of the school across each of the four major domains defined by EDB. The CRT sees this as serious self evaluation, which should lead to preservation of strengths, and to action and indeed cultural change in some areas. Finally, the Team agrees with the items defined as Major Areas of Concern (Focus) for 2006/07- 2008/09, and we comment later in the Report on one of these in particular - ‘Align curriculum, pedagogy and staffing with the NSS reforms and to comply with DSS requirements’.

- 2.5 The CRT notes the composition of the Council developed according to the Ordinance, which also reflects the school’s historical tradition. In the document, Performance Indicators for Hong Kong Schools 2002, reference is made to the ‘objectives and roles of the SMC....the composition of the Senior Management Committee (SMC) to include members like teachers, parents, alumni, community members and so on to enhance the transparency and accountability of the SMC’. Although the governance structure of the school does not permit the inclusion of a full range of stakeholders, its operation has allowed a diversity of needs to be reported to the SMC. For example, the Parent Teacher Association is formally constituted and is chaired by an elected parent. It is an active, influential and supportive body, with articulate and well informed leaders. Within the pastoral care structure of the school there is also a Home School Team, whose purpose is ‘to improve communication between parents and the school’. The team comprises twelve teachers from whom one is the Convener. From this team several working groups are formed to assist the Parent Teacher Association in organising talks and other activities, including the regular production of a Newsletter of the Parent Teacher Association. The Home School Team Convener reports ‘that good collaboration between this team and the PTA in the past few years had definitely established a closer relationship among parents, teachers and the school. With more participation in the activities organized by the PTA, the parents had a better understanding of the school policies and programmes’.

There are also informal meeting opportunities between the PTA and members of the Council. As for alumni, there is an active Alumni community, the President of whom is a member of the Council, and a further three or four alumni are members of the Council too. A structured programme exists whereby alumni volunteers act as career mentors to boys of the school, offering them hands-on experience in their firms and businesses, both in Hong Kong and on the Mainland. The Team notes that the strong support from the PTA and Council is also manifested in their facilitation of fund raising for the school. This allows the school to offer additional resources for school development and support for extra-curricular activities.

So while there is not a mechanism for the appointment of formally elected stakeholders from each of these areas to a single Committee with specific authorities, by other mechanisms and extensive networking, and through a

commitment of the school management and a structure through pastoral care teams, it appears that much the same goals are being achieved. There is no doubt that executive members of the PTA are very satisfied with communication between them and the school. They told us so quite clearly. Whether that level of communication and satisfaction exists more widely in the parent community is perhaps best seen in the Stakeholder parent surveys. The most recent one suggests high satisfaction for the 'school informs me of the major activities and latest developments', slightly lower scoring for 'sufficient channels for me to express my views to the school', and even lower for 'I am actively involved in school activities'. A high score is recorded for 'I have a good relationship with the school'.

- 2.6 The management of daily operations is impressive. Not only is documentation detailed, systematic, and well recorded and filed, but the reality on the ground is equally smooth. This is especially noteworthy in a school in which so much activity is occurring - including co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes, and renovation of the existing building fabric proceeding apace.
- 2.7 Aspects of teachers' work and workloads will be dealt with in other sections. It might be observed here that the Team sees some disconnect in communication between the senior staff who have frequent and regular access through meetings with the Principal and Vice-Principals, and the teachers overall. This does not present as a serious problem, but some teachers are not up to date with issues and decisions which could affect them and their work. They are not confident that they can themselves contribute to discussion of these issues. On the other hand, some senior staff believe they try very hard to elicit teacher views, but with limited success. A case in point is knowledge and awareness of the implications for the changes which derive from the coming New Senior Secondary (NSS) structure. All teachers have basic information about the changes, and many have attended courses and programmes designed to inform them. At the level of impact within the school internally, the impression gained is that, because not all detailed decisions have yet been made, some teachers feel they know nothing until they are told everything. They do not try to become engaged with the issues and the options.

If a disconnect has emerged, the proposal explained by the Principal to introduce new senior positions between Vice-Principals and Heads of Department, the creation of two positions of Assistant Vice-Principals, covering curriculum structures, and learning and teaching, appears positive and timely. It is not for the Review, of course, to advocate for or against specific options. Rather, our role is to identify issues, and try to make that identification as precise as possible, but leave to the school how best it might be addressed.

- 2.8 Though staff appraisal has been practised at the school for about ten years, only recently has a common universal system been in place. There is now more emphasis on subsequent follow up, a link with a broader annual discussion of career development with the Principal, and appraisal is no longer seen as a one day event. Some staff have yet to see the genuine benefits and self improvement that appraisal can bring. KPM (Key Performance

Management data provides schools in Hong Kong with their data matched against that for the Territory as a whole, for comparison) data suggests teachers have a slightly less positive view of appraisal than do their counterparts across the Territory as a whole.

It is not easy to accomplish credible appraisal in a school divided into sometimes quite small departments. Skilled senior staff are needed to conduct the appraisals, close enough to the teacher being appraised to be credible, but not too close to make things appear artificial. Appraisal can be very time consuming, and Heads of large departments (more than about ten staff) probably need a Deputy Head or senior assistant to share the load. The Teacher Survey data suggest there is room for improvement in this process, especially to ensure a shared understanding with school management.

A further complicating factor exists for new staff on relatively short term contract appointments, where appraisal can be seen not only for development purposes, but also related to contract renewal. New policies are presently under consideration to better take account of this.

- 2.9 Impending changes may lead to the creation of new Assistant Vice-Principal positions. Additionally, the CRT understands there will be a Head of Department for Liberal Studies, and something similar for 'Other Learning Experiences'. The CRT sees some advantage in using this opportunity to restructure Departments to a smaller number of groups of more comparable size rather than retain the present large number of small Departments. In itself this would bring more commonality and coordination into cognate areas, especially in the Sciences and the Humanities. It would emphasize common approaches, and also focus a manageable (smaller) number of Department Heads (probably about six) into a mutually cohesive team. The role of Heads would perhaps be more sharply defined, and the responsibilities attached to this role better acknowledged. Again, the CRT is not seeking to prescribe, but rather encourage a way forward better suited to overall curriculum and student needs.
- 2.10 The School was very forward looking in pioneering itself to become one of the first Direct Subsidy Schools (DSS) in Hong Kong. It has performed impressively as a DSS school, continuously receiving more applications for admission than those the school can offer. The CRT notes that the school attracts good students, and graduates of St. Paul's primary school continues to aspire for entering this school. The Annual School Plans shows deliberate efforts of the school to maintain a high standard of academic achievement, which the school sees as an important means of sustaining its reputation. Rather than showing complacency, the School Reports are self-critical, attending towards the problems that teachers are facing, and the areas that students need to improve.

3. STUDENT SUPPORT AND SCHOOL ETHOS

Support for Student Development

Pastoral care is acknowledged as central to the school achieving ‘whole-person development’. Teachers are required to ‘balance’ their subject teaching responsibilities with explicit care and attention to the different needs of individual students.

3.1 In the front line are the Form teachers of the 36 classes (about half the school’s teachers) who each have direct contact with about 30 boys, and who are the first point of contact with their homes. Then there is an elaborate structure of the Careers Team, the Civic Education Team, the Discipline Team, the Guidance Team, and the Chaplaincy service. In the Teacher’s Folder detailed guidelines set out booking procedures, duties of team advisers, House System and advisers, records cards, checklist and safety precautions for excursions and the organisation of the Student Association. Although the individual teams have their own specific roles, it is intended that they cooperate to provide students with more effective support than would otherwise be possible.

3.2 Bridging courses are held in the summer vacation to help incoming Form 1 students in using English as the medium of instruction and adapting to the very different life in a large complex secondary school as soon as possible.

‘Form One Orientation Day’ is run at the start of each school year to help these students further familiarize with life in the school. A parallel ‘Orientation Day’ is arranged for parents of these students to help them understand the school policy on conduct and discipline. A ‘peer mentor scheme’ provides newcomers with help from older boys and promotes harmonious relations between them. The positive role-modelling involved seems to be effective in providing academic, counselling and behavioural support to the junior students as well as helping the senior boys to further develop leadership, communication and coaching skills. The Form One students interviewed found this helpful in adapting to the new school life.

Form 1 (and other) students said their teachers had little awareness of what they had learned in primary school. Closer liaison between teachers in junior forms with St Paul’s own primary school would appear mutually advantageous.

3.3 This transition into the school is paralleled by the transition from the school through talks, visits and Inclination Assessments organised for senior students to enrich their knowledge of study choices and career pathways. As the Careers team has good links to an alumni support group, students benefit from contact with people who offer first hand information, and sometimes practical work experience, about future career prospects and alternatives. Some students have been able to experience work settings on the Mainland through support of enthusiastic alumni. However, the senior boys interviewed felt that

the current level of career programmes generally was insufficient to meet their needs.

- 3.4 Talks and workshops with different themes are arranged for students at different year levels as general guidance programmes. Topics covered recently include ‘relationships between the two sexes among adolescents’, ‘making friends’, ‘healthy financial management’, and ‘abstinence is better than over indulgence’. Where students are identified as needing special support (case referrals), a social worker is able to support guidance teachers and form teachers.
- 3.5 Yet the excellent structure of the Guidance Team reported in successive Annual Reports appears to be functioning less well in practice, due in part to the departure of an Educational Psychologist, and the consequent lack of specific expertise in diagnosis and professional follow up in more serious case counselling. It is likely that as boys of secondary school age face increasing difficulties in their personal lives in a modern affluent society the school will need to strengthen its capacities in the guidance area. The needs become more time consuming, teachers feel overstretched, and without professional guidance and expertise to handle complex cases.

If a qualified and experienced special education teacher was available in the school, the time spent in team teaching with other staff would be as significant as time spent working with students. Staff would gain from seeing at first hand how curriculum differentiation can be achieved within a normal classroom, and collaborative work with such a teacher would advance their skill base and their confidence.

- 3.6 The Careers Team and Guidance Team could become more proactive, anticipating student needs in advance, and preparing for them ahead of time. For example, they could inform Form 1 and Form 2 students of the New Senior Secondary system they will shortly experience. Talks should aim to arouse students’ active learning attitude, develop their enquiry skills and reflective learning, enhance their skills of analysis and change their mindset in preparation for Liberal Studies and for the school-based assessment of the NSS. More should be organized for senior students in preparing them for further study and for joining the working society. Furthermore, teams are encouraged to be more systematic and collaborative in their support of students. In these ways, many teachers could share their knowledge and experience with students in effective school-based programmes.
- 3.7 While comment has been made of the need better to cater for individual differences and for curriculum differentiation, a commendable programme of special integration for visually impaired students demonstrates the willingness of the school to expend resources in response to particular needs. The school has a long history of partnership with the Ebenezer School for the Blind. Many visually impaired students have graduated from the school. It is heartening to learn of a former visually impaired student completing an Education degree at Hong Kong University returning to his school for teaching practicum experience.

3.8 Extra-curricular Activities

Excursions, educational visits, field trips and training camps and overseas tours are organized by the teachers to support the curriculum, with on-site projects to widen the students' horizons. The Global Classroom Project enjoys strong support and finance from the College Council.

Selected students participate actively in many Hong Kong inter-school festivals, exhibitions and award programmes, and inter-school sports competitions. Similarly, students participate in appropriate overseas and international events. They do well in such competitions. In addition, within the school there are organised concerts, music performance, inter-class and inter-house sports competitions which promote and establish a culture of 'music for all' and 'sports for all'.

Some students remarked that the standard of the school choir and school orchestra have declined in recent years, as some high performers do not join, or leave, because of time clashes with other commitments outside the school. Some left because they felt the instructor was too strict. Students wish a way could be found to prevent students leaving, and so raise standards. One student suggested that the school send an official invitation letter instead of just telling them they have been selected, and that they should play for the school team. They see a formal invitation as an honour and they will be proud to be a member and so enhance their sense of belonging.

As well as encouraging the most proficient, the school promotes 'music for all' and 'sports for all'. Every student is encouraged to play at least one musical instrument. The Sports Union assists in organising a range of sports training programmes to meet different student interests. Students are active in football and basketball during recess, lunchtime and before and after school, both as players and spectators. With the well-structured House System, captains also arrange training sessions to prepare members to join in inter-house competitions.

3.9 Students' Association

The Students' Association has a Council and about 50 affiliated clubs. Council members are Form 6 students. Each year they recruit about 30 students from lower forms to be officials under the Duty Officer who allocates them to teams – such as Welfare Committee, Public Relations Committee, Programme Committee, Affiliated Club Committee, Student Publications Council, Audit Committee and Secretariat. Leadership training is provided for these students to familiarise them with their roles, and to prepare them to be future members of the Council.

The Chairs of the Students' Association and the affiliated clubs are nominated by themselves, elected by the members and endorsed by the teacher advisers concerned. Endorsement is justified on the grounds that some may not be suitable or capable to take up the posts, and they might affect the development of the clubs.

The Clubs are wide in scope and diverse in purpose. Some support students to advance in their academic studies (the Chinese History Club, the Computer Club, for example), while others cater for wider interest groups (the Gardening Club, Magic club, Bridge Club, for example). Many students interviewed join two or three clubs and enjoy participation. They say they learn to manage time well, and participation does not deflect from their studies. They say they learn new skills (such as negotiation skills) and obtain knowledge outside that gained from the classroom.

Normally, club members do not pay a membership fee. Normal running costs are met from subsidies from the Students' Association. Students do pay something to cover special events such as excursions, visits, camps, exhibitions and training sessions. Reports of club activities, posters for functions and artwork (for example, photographs produced by members of the Photography Club) are creative and well prepared.

Students interviewed say Form 5 students as chairs get busy preparing for public examinations and club activities are neglected. Another complaint is lack of communication between club officials and members. The school intranet might strengthen communication (through posters, minutes, financial reports, circulars). Advisers believe documents should be checked and endorsed before uploading because of possible grammatical errors. The CRT views that the existence of a large number of clubs shows the school's emphasis on student initiatives in pursuing their interests outside the classroom. It is natural that some clubs are more active than others, and that clubs even come and go, if these clubs reflect students' interests. However, it is worthwhile for the school to consider a channel for students to convey their needs and views for strengthening club activities which are obviously an important component of student life in the school.

3.10 Other Activities

The school has good relations with other local schools and some overseas schools. Joint school functions and exchange programmes have been organised. Boy Scout is one of the oldest organisations in the school. It is led by about 30 leaders and instructors from teachers and alumni. Other activities offered to students through arrangement with the school include Community Youth Club, Red Cross, Interact Club and Junior Police Call.

3.11 Towards 'Other Learning Experiences'

The CRT notes that the school is designing a system to record students' participation in extra-curricular activities and their achievement in inter-school competitions. The terms co-curricular, extra-curricular and other learning activities are used in plans and reports. Clear definitions of the terms may be needed. It is suggested that a coordinator could be appointed to oversee the links among the activities concerned, to streamline the activities of the affiliated clubs and to collaborate with the students' support teams.

3.12 The School Foundation

From an active Alumni Association both in Hong Kong and in some overseas cities, the school has created a Foundation for long term support of the students and the school community. In 2008 the Foundation is supporting the expansion of e-learning, broadening the Global Classroom project, and collating and preserving the school's archives.

3.13 The CRT is very impressed with the amount of student activities available in the school, the degree of autonomy that students in club activities, the degree of engagement of students in these activities, and the number of students involving in these activities. The School Foundation has become a significant support student activities not only financially, but also geographically in reaching out towards explorations and connections beyond Hong Kong.

4. STUDENT PERFORMANCE

- 4.1 Student behaviour was observed in lessons in all subject areas and at most year levels. In seven days at the school, CRT members had extensive interaction with students informally and outside the classroom, as well as in meetings formally scheduled. Students are polite, well behaved, and respectful of each other as well as with teachers and visitors. In classes, students appear a bit passive, though cooperative and friendly with each other and with their teachers.

In the student surveys they express they 'like my school' and 'get along with my classmates'. They are strongly positive about 'understanding the teachers' explanations and instructions in lessons using English as the medium of instruction', but give the lowest scores to 'interest in participating in the reading organised by the school' and liking 'to share my reading experience with my classmates.' This shows students' general positive experience in school life, as they like the teachers, like the classmates and like the schools. However, the less positive response towards reading suggested that the school should review its strategies in promoting reading. It seems that students may feel being pushed or expected to read rather than be intrinsically interested in reading.

In the year just ended, the percentage attendance varied across the forms from a high of 98.8 in Form 5 to a low of 97.9 in Form 7. These percentages were roughly comparable with Territory means, higher than the mean in four of the seven grade levels.

Due to the many opportunities for inter-school activities, overseas tours and the introduction of the Global Classroom, students have a comparatively wide perspective and knowledge of the world. The school prefect system, the mentorship scheme and other club activities nourish a kind of brotherhood among the students.

- 4.2 Internal school assessment includes ongoing work as well as mid year and final examinations. Both formative and summative assessments are adopted. The weighting between them is considered fair. A simple assessment portfolio system has started with lower form students. The level of assessment is uniform across all students. Teachers give immediate feedback after oral presentations to provide directions for future improvement.

Team members noted marking schemes are clear, proper and fair, and the marking of assignments, tests and examinations are accurate, often with useful feedback. But it will be a step forward if additional modes of assessment can be used to assess conceptual knowledge, higher order thinking skills and attitudes. To move further towards 'assessment for learning' and less 'assessment of learning', subject teams should consider developing a more holistic and comprehensive assessment plan, which considers the validity and reliability of assessment, and the use of a variety of modes and methods of both formative and summative assessment.

- 4.3 In the most recent HKCEE, well over 90 percent of students gained grade E or above in at least five subjects, but due to adopting a new reporting method in 2007 by HKEAA, comparative data are no longer available. For the school, this result was below that in recent years, which derives in part from a different intake selection procedure for the Form 1 cohort in 2002/03.

The percentage of students in the school who were awarded 14 points or more in their best 6 subjects was considerably higher than the Territory mean.

The HKALE results of the school remain sound, with a very high percentage of students reaching minimum entrance requirements for local degree courses. The school achieved substantially ahead of the Territory mean.

- 4.4 In the area of non-academic performance, the degree of students participating in inter-school events among the S1-S3 and S4-S7 groupings is impressive. Likewise, the degree of students participating in uniform social and voluntary service groups (such as Scout Association, Community Youth Club, Junior Police Call) in both S1-S3 and S4-S7 was clearly active.

PROGRAMME REVIEW

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Curriculum

The curriculum as taught embodies the basic Mission to offer a modern liberal education, within the specifications of school education in Hong Kong, and in the English language.

- 5.1 In each subject the curriculum follows the guidelines issued by the Curriculum Development Council of the Education Bureau, with the senior years focused on the requirements of HKCEE and HKALE. Evidence collected from inspection of curriculum documents (schemes of work, assessment guides, examination and test papers, student works and project works) and lesson observations show curricula to be carefully developed and thoroughly documented.
- 5.2 Yet the curriculum of the school has evolved from separate developments in individual subjects, as is clear from the structure of the teaching staff into a large number of separate, and in some cases, quite small departments. This brings some strengths, such as the clear commitment to keeping abreast of developments and advances within the specific subject, and the ways in which it can be better taught. But there is less evidence for cross discipline sharing, or curriculum integration, even within cognate fields such as the Humanities or the Visual Arts and Music.

The major attention for the future could be to target curriculum integration, and so develop a curriculum philosophy which is unique to the school. At present, individual subject teachers work hard for their own subjects, but there is little evidence of team work and collaboration beyond subject boundaries. A master plan development could show which topics will be covered across subject areas, and which will not, and why. A curriculum philosophy specific to the school could gradually evolve, and school knowledge, specific to St Paul's will then emerge.

- 5.3 In fields such as the Sciences, Computer Studies, and in the Visual Arts and Music, specialist facilities and teaching resources are above the average standard. The two Visual Arts rooms in the newly built South Wing, for example, are equipped with all necessary facilities and equipment, including IT facilities and long and spacious stainless steel sinks. These rooms are ideal venues for Art activities. Similarly well equipped are two Biology, two Chemistry and two Physics laboratories, which are also well used by junior forms in Integrated Science. The two computer rooms are spacious and well equipped with hardware and software upgrades. Likewise there is good provision of funding for the purchase of library books.

- 5.4 In the distribution of allocated time across subjects, the CRT thought that additional time could be warranted in two areas. One is Chinese Language, where comparable schools in Hong Kong devote a little more time to the subject. The other is Computer Literacy, where one period is allotted per week for all classes in Form 1 to Form 3. This is apparently well below that suggested by the Curriculum Development Council (2002), and similarly well below the Technology mean allocation across the Territory, as shown in KPM data.

The time allocation for Mathematics is also a little below the Territory mean (KPM data), but less so than in these other two subjects.

This would necessitate reduction elsewhere, possibly in English which properly has a major allocation of time and assists students beginning to learn all subjects in English. A change of this kind, of course, requires thorough consultation and exploration before a decision is taken, and many considerations bear on this.

- 5.5 Despite this, the CRT regards that the school has a well designed curriculum across subjects, particularly in its goal to maintain a high standard of academic achievements in these subjects. Curriculum management is in good order, as observed by the CRT in its meetings with individual teachers and the Department Heads. The school is well aware of the upcoming NSS, and in its meetings with teachers, preparation for the NSS was among the most frequently mentioned concern expressed by the teachers and the school management. Almost every teacher interviewed expressed that have attended seminars and professional development courses in preparing for the upcoming NSS, and how to design appropriate curriculum strategies is an obvious agenda of the school.

Teaching

- 5.6 In all subject areas, CRT members commented that teachers were well qualified, and many of them show clearly established competence of a high order, and all are conscientious about professional development. Although the KPM report data suggest the number of continuing professional development hours undertaken by teachers at the school to be well short of the median and mean for the Territory as a whole, the subject Annual Reports show impressive attendance at professional development courses by teachers at this school. The classroom teaching performance as observed and the assignments prepared for students, when coupled with the other significant responsibilities undertaken, show a group of able professionals, well versed in their subjects, and extremely hard working.

Moreover, in nearly all subject areas, students enjoy considerable success in externally benchmarked examinations. In a society where examination results weigh heavily, and students and their parents are anxious to obtain high grades, it is hard to ask more of devoted and competent teachers who are achieving good examination outcomes.

- 5.7 In most observed classes, the teacher dominates – talks for a considerable time, asks individual students factual questions, and focuses student activity on completing exercises in the textbook or on worksheets. Students ask few questions. There is little student to student interaction, little work in smaller groups within the class, and little attempt to cater, within the lesson, for either more able or less able students. It is defended on the grounds that there is a large syllabus to cover in quite limited time, and students show impatience if discussion moves beyond matters likely to be examined.

CRT members agreed first, that a high proportion of the questions asked in class largely belonged to ‘what’ questions. Few questions were about ‘why’. Students themselves rarely asked a question, and seldom ‘why’, or queried the answers given either by the teacher or by another student. Second, a fair amount of class time was devoted to ‘filling in the blanks’ on worksheets, problem sheets or from a textbook related publication. Third, home assignments were similar, reinforcing the impression of content-driven teaching towards testing and examination. Even in the lower forms, where public examinations are still far away, the same approach was found, defended on the basis that students and parents expect it. All this leads to passivity in the classroom, in contrast with the alert interest observed in students outside the classroom.

While teaching and learning are clearly academically focused and achievement oriented, the CRT views that there is room for improvement in enhancing issue-based learning, problem-based learning, collaborative learning and inquiry or discovery based learning in the teaching and learning process.

To achieve change would require a decision to reduce the syllabus coverage, leaving out some topics in order to make time to probe more thoroughly into others. Especially in the earlier years this would be possible, though it would need explaining to the boys why this was important and why it was being done. The present situation where teachers are anxious they will be criticized by the students is unhealthy and needs to be resisted. Similarly, the understanding and support of parents will be needed, no doubt beginning with the supportive parents who are active within the Parent Teacher Association. With such a good group of teachers and students, the PTA could explore ways to make the teachers and students feel less constrained, so learning becomes more inquiry oriented, driven by intrinsic interest in the topic.

- 5.8 Another way of reducing the emphasis on examinations would be to increase the proportion of class-based assessment. Presently this accounts for only 10 percent of the total assessment in each half year. The remainder of the year’s assessment comprises 30 percent for the mid-year exam and 50 percent for the end of year exam. By international comparison, this is a low weighting for work done by students through the year. If increased, it could reduce exam pressure.

Learning

- 5.9 All CRT members report students to be very well behaved. Even junior students frequently moving stations in a science laboratory were remarkably attentive and serious about what they were doing. They do try to respond to teachers' questions – not easy for junior students answering in English on subjects with extensive new vocabulary. They appear well prepared and engaged. They demonstrate good knowledge of the subjects they are learning.

This is inconsistent with some subject Annual Reports which express concern about needing to improve examination performance, and frustrations about 'lazy' students who should work harder. Despite the felt difficulties expressed by teachers, the CRT regards that this cohort of students is strong group of students, and that the school should take pride in being able to attract them.

Most of the complaints expressed in the Annual Reports focused on examination performance. The school needs to seriously review whether an examination-oriented classroom experience is the most desirable classroom experience for these students.

- 5.10 Out of classroom activities are providing splendid opportunities for more sophisticated learning in many areas. In Science, for example, the Science Study Tour to Cambridge University, participating in various Science Olympiads, in the Budding Scientists Awards and especially the Joint School Science Exhibition; in English, the Lunchtime Programme, the English Fun Day, the English Drama Workshops, and the commendable achievements in the Schools' Speech Festival. The Budding Poets Award and Chartered Institute of Logistics Student Essay Competition. Parallel activities occur in other subject areas.

Students are keen, active and happy when engaged in these extra-curricular activities. This is in contrast with the classroom situation with its lack of challenge between teacher and students. Instead of being 'active' in participation, they were 'passively active', trying to prove they were good students rather than trying to be soul-searching in pursuing deep learning. (As mentioned elsewhere, the 'passivity' observed could be atypical, due to the presence of unknown external observers.)

Performance Assessment

- 5.11 The assessment of students carried out by teachers was carefully planned and consistently implemented. This includes not only the setting and marking of formal examinations and major project work, but shorter tests, quizzes and home assignments as well. CRT members noted comments of praise and encouragement in some corrected work, more so in fact than in class lessons. Some corrected work gave little guidance for students, and in such cases it was felt that correcting fewer pieces of work but more thoroughly could be more effective. Generally, assessment of learning dominated assessment for learning, and a better balance would be worth the effort.

Assessment information is well recorded and so enables the school and teachers to monitor student progress. It would be good to see more reflective use of this information in the subject Annual Reports, where specific learning skills or topics posing difficulties might be identified and ways of enhancing learning discussed.

- 5.12 Teachers should be commended for their willingness to offer additional support to students; both enhancement classes for weaker achievers and enrichment classes for high achievers. These are run after school and on Saturday mornings. Their effectiveness is limited by competing pressures for student time – other activities related to the school, or outside school activities including paid private tutoring. The issues raised warrant further discussion within the Parent Teacher Association as well as with individual students and their families.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The school is presently enjoying a period of stimulating and forward-looking leadership which is manifest in policy development, implementation of exciting new programmes such as the Global Classroom project, and extensive renovation and renewal of the fabric and infrastructure.

Operationally, the school runs smoothly, effectively and without fuss. A well coordinated and cooperative management team is in place. As well, the school has a dedicated and competent staff, and draws very good student intakes despite some unsettling changes arising from the change to DSS status.

Yet this school, like other schools in this society and beyond, faces real challenges in the medium-term future. The challenges arise not fundamentally from structural changes such as the impending NSS system, not even primarily from the need to adopt new approaches to learning, but rather from the deep shifts that are occurring in society itself, which strain basic assumptions and expectations within families, call for new balances between work and life, and from the changing structures of prospects for employment which require a need to remain alert to continual reskilling and relearning.

Schools are called on to prepare their students for this changing world, with all the opportunities and threats that lie ahead. Schools are not simply preparing students to do well in examinations and to learn lots of subject content material. As the present century opened, the Hong Kong Education Commission declared in its consultation document Review of Education System's Reform Proposals:

'Imparting knowledge is no longer the principal function of education. The role of education should be to enhance students' quality and potential'.

To help achieve this change in orientation and direction, the CRT offers four suggestions:

1) An integrated curriculum and new pedagogy

First among our suggestions is the need to point up the connectedness between what is presented as separate individual subjects, to show links and commonalities, and in so doing, show students how new understandings emerge, and how new discoveries and innovations occur. This is the purpose of encouraging an integrated curriculum which can be unique to this school. The elements already exist, especially through the extensive out of classroom activities which dedicated teachers now support.

Related to this is an expansion of pedagogic approaches which brings new teaching styles, building on existing skills and developing further the potential of e-learning. Reducing the pressure of coverage for examinations will lead to investigative and other varied approaches which result in deeper learning with more meaning for students.

This amounts to nothing less than a cultural change which will take many years to refine and embed. But the time to start is now.

2) Strengthen personal guidance and cater better for individual needs and differences

Being aware of the way individual students are impacted by and respond to their own circumstances requires a skill base within the school that many teachers have yet to acquire. Whether strengthened by the presence of a special education teacher or an educational psychologist or gaining leadership for the Guidance Team in other ways, what seems important is to have a presence, within the school, of a person demonstrating day by day to staff and students how diagnosis, counselling and follow up can be more effectively managed.

3) Ensure communication across all stakeholders of the school, (students, parents and teachers) occurs as detailed planning decisions are advanced for the New Senior Secondary System

While team members with knowledge of other Hong Kong schools see a lag in the readiness of the school for NSS, it could be that what is already in place in the planning of senior decision makers has yet to reach students, some teachers and some parents. This could become confusing if the possible move to adopt, in addition, Cambridge IGCSE and Cambridge A-Level Exam opportunities are introduced at the same time. This latter option is planned to begin through small scale pilots, with limited numbers of students and limited numbers of subjects in the early years. While advantageous for the students and for the school, detailed and careful implementation will be important.

4) Develop the culture of a learning organisation

CRT team members are very appreciative the hard work of the whole school in maintaining high standards in school management, teaching and learning, and student support. Team members consider that the school can advance further by developing a culture of learning organization, so that teachers strengthen their team work and mutual support mechanism, share more effectively what individual teachers have learned from professional development courses, take appraisals more positively, and develop continuous learning cycles and new achievement targets for self advancement.

Finally, the CRT recognizes that St Paul's College enjoys very good reputation in Hong Kong. The CRT regards that the school has provided a very positive educational experience for students, in view of its academic achievement records, the degree of students' engagement in extra-curricular activities, the schools' support to students in pursuing their interests both in terms of its flexibility in forming clubs and the financial support to students for participating in many of the extra-curricular activities, as well as students' positive feedback in student surveys.

As a concluding remark, the CRT was very impressed with the high quality of the management and the teaching performance of the school. Moreover, the CRT team was impressed the degree of self-criticism among the management team and the teaching team of the school. The degree of self-criticism shows the degree of confidence among the staff, and the intention to seek further advancement from both the management and teaching teams. The features of this report reflect the mixture of achievements and self-critique of the school. On the one hand, the CRT recognizes the various achievements of the school, such as the principal's pledge for school reform, and the degree of openness of the school for the CRT to get access to documentation, teachers, students and PTA in the process of review. Further, at all levels, while being confident with the efforts of the school in providing quality education, there was a genuine expression of dissatisfaction about the status quo, and request for suggestions for areas of improvement.

This enables the CRT to identify both the strengths of the school, and the areas that need improvement. The CRT's overall observation is that this is a school of very good quality. As will be shown in the Key Learning Area (KLA) reports and classroom observations, the CRT team's KLA experts commend the very good teaching performance of the school. Having commendation on the good teaching performance notwithstanding, the school's openness allows the team to identify certain areas that would require further breakthroughs. In sum, despite having a high quality of teaching and learning, the school can further improve itself if it diverts itself from the examination pressure, introduce more diverse teaching and learning approaches, and pay more attention to the diverse abilities of the students. The CRT makes these comments based upon the general good performance of the school, rather than criticising the schools for what it fails to do. For example, the CRT has had deep discussion with the school guidance team, and understand that the team has attended to a wide spectrum of problems that the students are facing, and is impressed with their frankness in sharing their challenges with the team members.